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SERVICE DATE - AUGUST 23, 2000

**SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC 20423**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NO. AB- 33(SUB-NO. 156)

**Union Pacific Railroad Company - Abandonment and
Discontinuance of Service - Bellaire Subdivision - Harris, Fort Bend, Austin, Wharton and
Colorado Counties, Texas**

BACKGROUND

In this proceeding, the **Union Pacific Railroad Company (UP)** has filed an application seeking authority under 49 U.S.C. 10903 to abandon and discontinue service over the Bellaire Subdivision from railroad milepost 3.84 near Bellaire Junction in Houston to milepost 52.9 near Chesterville, a distance of 49.42 miles in Harris, Fort Bend, Austin, Wharton and Colorado Counties, TX. A map depicting the rail line in relationship to the area served is appended to the report. If the application is approved, typically the railroad will be able to salvage track, ties and other railroad appurtenances, and to dispose of the right-of-way. However, as discussed below, UP has already sold the Bellaire Subdivision.

DESCRIPTION AND STATUS OF THE LINE

In its application UP states that on December 30, 1992, UP sold the Bellaire Subdivision to the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO), including all track and track material. UP retained an operating easement and its common carrier obligation to provide service over the Bellaire Subdivision with the understanding that the Bellaire Subdivision would ultimately be used by METRO for various forms of public transportation. UP now seeks to abandon its easement and to discontinue service.

UP states in its application that track and associated track materials are now owned by METRO and that UP will not remove any of the track materials as part of this abandonment process.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

UP submitted an environmental report that concludes the quality of the human environment will not be affected significantly as a result of the abandonment or any post-abandonment activities, including salvage and disposition of the right-of-way. The railroad has served the environmental report on a number of appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies as required by the Board's environmental rules at 49 CFR 1105.7(b). We have reviewed the record in this proceeding.

In its application UP states that there are four shippers who used the line in 1999 and that UP moved 399 carloads. From January to April 2000, UP states that it moved 71 carloads. If abandonment is approved, and assuming all rail traffic will be diverted to trucks, and using UP's base year traffic levels of 203 carloads (May 1, 1999 to April 30, 2000), approximately 812 additional trucks would move annually over area roadways. Given the large number of truck traffic in the greater House metropolitan area, UP concludes, and SEA agrees with this conclusion, that this additional truck traffic will not significantly affect current truck traffic levels or the affected environment.

CONDITIONS

We recommend that no environmental conditions be placed on any decision granting abandonment authority.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided from all sources to date, we conclude that, as currently proposed, abandonment of the line will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the environmental impact statement process is unnecessary.

Normally, in an Environmental Assessment, the public is invited to consider alternative uses for the right-of-way following abandonment and salvage, such as requesting a public use condition or a trail's use condition. Here, however, UP has already sold the Bellaire Subdivision to METRO for alternative public uses.

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

The Board's Office of Public Services responds to questions regarding interim trail use, public use, and other reuse alternatives. You may contact the Office of Public Services directly at (202) 565-1592, or mail inquiries to Surface Transportation Board, Office of Public Services, Washington, DC 20423.

COMMENTS

If you wish to file comments regarding this environmental assessment, you should send an **original and two copies** to Vernon A. Williams, Office of the Secretary, Washington, DC 20423, to the attention of Dana White, who prepared this environmental assessment. **Please refer to Docket No. AB-33 (Sub No. 156) in all correspondence addressed to the Board.** If you have questions regarding this environmental assessment, you should contact Dana White at (202) 565-1552.

Date made available to the public: 8/23/2000

Comment due date: 9/21/2000 (30 Days)

By the Board, Elaine K. Kaiser, Chief, Section of Environmental Analysis.

Vernon A. Williams
Secretary

Attachment

PLEASE SCAN MAP